SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Sir, the hon. Prime Minister is very much in the House. Please suspend the Question Hour and allow the debate. ...(*Interruptions*)... Sir, we demand the suspension of the Question Hour.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please allow the Question Hour to proceed. ..(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Sir, nothing is more improtant than agriculture. ...(*Interruptions*)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: The House is adjourned till 12.00 hours.

*The House then adjourned at seven minutes past eleven of the clock.*

The House reassembled at 12.00 Noon.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

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## WRITTEN ANSWERS TO STARRED QUESTIONS

### Sethusamudram Canal

*41. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether according to the book entitled "Images India" published by NRSA (National Remote Sensing Agency), satellite images have revealed that "an ancient bridge existed between India and Sri Lanka in Palk Strait";

(b) if so, whether Government is also aware that a large number of people in the country consider Ram Setu/Adams Bridge, a national monument due to its antiquity and unique features/historical importance in Ram Charit Manas; and

(c) if so, Government's final decision regarding construction of Sethusamudram Canal by dredging a portion of Ram Setu and whether the same has been conveyed to the Supreme Court?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) In the brief note given in the atlas for the image showing Adam's Bridge in the publication 'Images India' brought out in 2006 by National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) of the Department of Space, it has, *inter alia*, been stated that satellite images have revealed an ancient bridge between India and Sri Lanka in the Palk Strait. It is also states that it is made of a chain of shoals. The Atlas/Book on 'Images India' brought out in 2006 by National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) is basically a compendium of satellite images taken from Indian Remote Sensing Satellites (IRS) essentially intended for creating public awareness on the diverse landscapes of the country, and to popularize the use of space images.

(b) and (c) The Sethusamudram Ship Channel Project, which was approved by the Government in May, 2005, involves dredging for the creation of a continuous navigational channel connecting the Gulf of Mannar and the Bay of Bengal through Adam's Bridge, Palk Bay and Palk Strait with a view to providing a continuous navigable route connecting the east and west coasts and running within its own territorial waters around the Indian Peninsula. However, pursuant to orders passed by the Supreme Court on 31.8.2007 and 14.9.2007, dredging work at Adam's Bridge area has been suspended. Further, pursuant to the submissions made before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India by the Government Counsel

on 14.9.2007 in respect of certain transferred cases and writ petitions relating to the Sethusamudram Ship Channel Project, the Government constituted a Committee consisting of eminent persons on 5.10.2007 with the terms of reference to invite objections and suggestions from all concerned including the writ petitioners having interest in the subject matter and to consider all suggestions/proposals/documents after giving them a personal hearing. The Committee has submitted its report on 29.11.2007. The report of the Committee is being studied. The matter is *subjudice.*

**Preparations for Beijing Olympics**

*42. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN: Will the Minister of YOUTH AFFAIRS AND SPORTS be pleased to state:

(a) the preparations made for winning more medals in the forthcoming Beijing Olympics;

(b) whether any steps have been taken to sort out the problems being faced by our athletes and sportspersons which prevent them from winning medals at Olympic Games even though we are the second largest country in the world;

(c) if so, the specific steps taken by Government during each of the last three years in this regard and the sports and events in which our sportspersons are expected to excel during the forthcoming Olympic games; and

(d) the amount spent by the Union Government on preparations for Olympics, so far?

THE MINISTER OF YOUTH AFFAIRS AND SPORTS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) As against one silver medal won in Athens Olympics 2004, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the National Sports Federations (NSFs) have identified medal probables in 6 of the 11 disciplines in which India is likely to participate in Beijing Olympic, 2008 and are implementing their training programme in terms of coaching, international exposures, scientific and equipment support and engagement of foreign coaches. On the basis of the training given and the current performances of the players, India is estimated to hold promising medal prospects in the disciplines of Shooting, Archery, Wrestling, Boxing, Athletics and Tennis.

(b) While the steps outlined in (a) above are designed to overcome specific problems in different prospective sports disciplines, our overall performance in the Olympics has not been satisfactory in the past mainly because of the narrow pool of talented athletes from which our talent is drawn compared to the overall strength of our youth population. Talent on a vast scale has to be spotted, nurtured and trained to eventually and exponentially expand our medal prospects. With a view to addressing this issue, the Ministry proposes to implement Panchayat Yuva Krida Aur Khel Abhiyan, which is aimed at providing basic sports infrastructure and promoting sports competitions at the grassroots level. Apart from broad-basing of sports, in the long run, this will result in exponential growth in the identification of gifted and talented athletes who can then be groomed in to high performing athletes and thus lead to increased medal prospects at the international level. The Ministry has also prepared a Draft Comprehensive National Sports Policy, 2008, which apart from addressing the deficiencies in the system, aims at generating a positive attitude towards sports in the country thus facilitating the emergence of India as a leading sporting nation.

(c) and (d) Preparations for winning more medals in all major international events, including the Beijing Olympics, is an on-going process and is based on the Long Term Development Plans (LTDP) prepared by the NSFs. Government provides assistance to the